

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 IO-14 EUR-12 HA-05 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3016
INFO USIA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 21849

E.O. 11652:N/A
SUBJECT: ASST. SEC. ATHERTON INTERVIEWS

REF.: (A) STATE 299953 (B) CAIRO 21730

1. FOLLOWING ARE TEXTS OF INTERVIEWS GIVEN BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY
ATHERTON ON DECEMBER 14 TO ABC AND CBS TELEVISION. FIRST CONDUCTED
BY BARY DUNSMORE OF ABC, SECOND BY BRUNO WASSERTHEIL OF CBS.

2. DUNSMORE: "MR. SECRETARY, IN TERMS OF THE CAIRO CONFERENCE,
WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MR. BEGIN'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON?"
ATHERTON: "I THINK IT'S PART OF THE OVERALL PROCESS THAT IS GOING
ON NOW. WE HAVE DISCUSSIONS AMONG VARIOUS PARTIES AT VARIOUS LEVELS.
I MEAN YOU CAN'T REALLY COMPARTMENTALIZE THE PROCESS OF PEACEMAKING.
I SEE IT AS VERY STRONGLY SUPPORTIVE OF CAIRO CONFERENCE AS UNDER-
LINING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS THAT ARE
GOING ON HERE."

Q: "IT DOESN'T IN ANY WAY ECLIPSE WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?"

A: "I DON'T THINK IT DOES AT ALL, I THINK ITS VERY SUPPORTIVE OF
IT."

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Q: "THERE ARE RUMORS TODAY THAT MR. SADAT MAY ALSO BE ON HIS WAY TO
WASHINGTON."

A: "I KNOW OF NO PLANS, NO DISCUSSION OF THAT AT THE PRESENT TIME."

Q: "AT THE PRESENT TIME."

A: "WHAT I AM SAYING IS, IT IS NOT SOMETHING THAT IS PRESENTLY UNDER CONSIDERATION."

Q: "WHEN DO YOU THINK THIS CONFERENCE WOULD BE RAISED TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER LEVEL?"

A: "I THINK IT IS TOO SOON REALLY TO MAKE THAT JUDGEMENT. THIS WILL DEPEND UPON THE KIND OF PROGRESS THAT IS MADE HERE, HOW RAPIDLY IT IS MADE, ON THE JUDGEMENTS OF THE GOVERNMENTS REPRESENTED HERE ON WHEN IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO HAVE THE FOREIGN MINISTERS COME. I DON'T THINK IT IS POSSIBLE RIGHT NOW REALLY TO PUT THAT IN ANY PARTICULAR TIME FRAME

Q: "SO THERE ARE NO PLANS FOR MR. VANCE AND MR. DAYAN TO ARRIVE HERE IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS?"

A: "NONE WHATSOEVER."

Q: "THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS THAT MR. BEGIN'S PROPOSALS WHICH HE WILL BE TAKING TO MR. CARTER WILL ALSO BE PRESENTED HERE IN CAIRO BY THE ISRAELIS TO THE EGYPTIANS. ARE YOU AWARE OF THAT?"

A: "I THINK, PUTTING MR. BEGIN'S TRIP IN THE CONTEXT OF PROPOSALS IS PERHAPS TOO NARROW A FOCUS. HE IS GOING FOR AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH

THE PRESIDENT, AS I UNDERSTAND IT, ON THE BROAD RANGE OF QUESTIONS UNCLASSIFIED

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WHICH ARE OBVIOUSLY ALSO THE KINDS OF QUESTIONS THAT ARE GOING TO BE UNDER DISCUSSION HERE AT THE EXPERT LEVEL, AND INEVITABLY THERE ARE INTER-RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TALKS IN CAPITALS AND TALKS AT THE CONFERENCE."

Q: "SO YOU'RE NOT EXPECTING THAT SO-CALLED BEGIN PEACE PLAN WOULD BE PUT ON THE TABLE HERE IN CAIRO?"

A: "I THINK IT IS TOO SOON TO SAY WHAT EACH OF THE PARTIES HERE IS GOING TO PUT ON THE TABLE. WE HAVE'NT EVEN HAD THE FIRST NEGOTIATING SESSION YET."

Q: "WHAT IS YOUR IMPRESSION OF THE FIRST SESSION?"

A: "THE OPEN SESSION TODAY?"

Q: "YES."

A: "I THINK IT WAS A REMARKABLE AND A VERY MOVING EXPERIENCE. IT IS THE FIRST IN HISTORY, YOU KNOW, THE FIRST TIME IN AN ARAB CAPITAL OR IN THE CAPITAL OF ONE OF THE PARTIES THAT TWO OF THEM HAVE SAT DOWN

AND BEGUN TALKING."

Q: "ANOTHER POINT THAT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF MR. BEGIN'S TRIP TO TALK TO THE PRESIDENT IS TO PERSUADE THE UNITED STATES NOT TO STAND IN THE WAY OF A SEPARATE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI AGREEMENT. IF IT CAME TO THAT, WHAT WOULD BE THE U.S. POSITION?"

A: "WELL, IN THE FIRST INSTANCE I DISCOUNT THAT INTERPRETATION OF MR. BEGIN'S TRIP BECAUSE HE HIMSELF HAS SAID PUBLICLY, AS HAS PRESIDENT SADAT, AND AS HAS PRESIDENT CARTER, THAT THE OBJECTIVE OF ALL OF US, AND WE HOPE THE OBJECTIVE OF THE OTHER PARTIES TO THIS CONFLICT IS AN OVERALL PEACE SETTLEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST. I THINK IT IS SIMPLY PREMATURE TO DISCUSS THAT KIND OF A POSSIBILITY WHEN IT SIMPLY HAS NOT ARISEN AT THE PRESENT TIME."

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Q: "HOW LONG DO YOU THINK THIS FIRST PHASE OF THE CAIRO CONFERENCE WILL GO?"

A: "WELL, AT THIS POINT IT IS RATHER OPEN-ENDED. UNTIL THE DELEGATES HAVE HAD A CHANCE TO GET TOGETHER AND TALK A BIT MORE ABOUT PLANNING THE WORKING SESSIONS I THINK IT IS PROBABLY TOO SOON TO SAY."

Q: "CAN ANYTHING BE REALLY ACCOMPLISHED HOWEVER AT THIS LEVEL WITH PEOPLE LESS THAN FOREIGN MINISTERS?"

A: "WE CAN ACCOMPLISH WHAT THE INSTRUCTIONS WE GET FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS ENABLE US TO ACCOMPLISH, AND THAT IS WHY I SAID EARLIER THAT YOU CAN'T COMPARTMENTALIZE. WHAT HAPPENS IN CAPITALS WILL HAVE ITS FEEDBACK ON THE CONFERENCE. WHAT HAPPENS HERE WILL HELP GENERATE

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MINISTER BEGIN TO THE UNITED STATES AN INDICATION THAT THE CAIRO
CONFERENCE MAY BE IN TROUBLE EVEN AS IT STARTS?"

A: "NOT AT ALLMR. WASSERTHEIL, I THINK, QUITE THE CONTRARY IT
UNDERLINES THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE NEGOTIATIONS THAT ARE STARTING
HERE. THE VISIT BY THE PRIME MINISTER TO SEE PRESIDENT CARTER IS
VERY DIRECTLY RELATED TO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AREA, TO THE
NEED TO REVIEW THEM AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL, AND OUT OF THAT I THINK
ONE CAN EXPECT THAT THERE WOULD BE FEEDBACK TO THE NEGOTIATIONS THAT
ARE ALSO GOING ON HERE."

Q: "HOW IS IT THAT A TRIP TO WASHINGTON WILL BE REQUIRED NOW, LESS
THAN A WEEK AFTER SECRETARY OF STATE VANCE HAD DIRECT TALKS WITH
PRIME MINISTER BEGIN IN JERUSALEM?"

A: "THERE IS NO REAL SUBSTITUTE FOR THE CHIEFS OF STATE GETTING
TOGETHER FACE TO FACE. THE MEETINGS BETWEEN THE SECRETARY AND
MR. BEGIN WERE EXTRAORDINARILY USEFUL. MR. BEGIN FELT THAT HE
WOULD LIKE TO FOLLOW THOSE UP BY A DIRECT TALK WITH PRESIDENT
CARTER, HE SUGGESTED THIS. THE PRESIDENT WELCOMED IT AND IT IS
REALLY AS SIMPLE AS THAT."

Q: "THERE IS TALK THAT PRESIDENT SADAT MAY BE GOING TO THE UNITED
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STATES AS WELL, MAY EVEN BE ON HIS WAY TO THE UNITED STATES NOW FOR
MEETINGS WITH PREMIER BEGIN THERE AND WITH PRESIDENT CARTER. CAN YOU
TELL US ANYTHING ABOUT THAT?"

A: "THERE IS NO PRESENT DISCUSSION, THAT I AM AWARE OF, OF A VISIT
BY PRESIDENT SADAT TO THE UNITED STATES. IT SIMPLY HAS NOT ARISEN UP
TO NOW."

Q: "THERE ARE ALSO RUMORS OF CONFLICT BETWEEN THE EGYPTIAN AND
ISRAELI DELEGATIONS EVEN BEFORE THE START OF THE CONFERENCE. FOR
INSTANCE, THE FACT THAT THE PALESTINIAN OR PLO FLAG IS FLYING ALONG-
SIDE THE ISRAELI FLAG IN FRONT OF MENA HOUSE TODAY, WAS NOT DONE
WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE ISRAELI DELEGATION."

A: " I WOULD HAVE TO SAY FROM MY MEETINGS WITH THE EGYPTIAN
DELEGATION, AND THE ISRAELI DELEGATION AND IN THE OPENING PUBLIC
SESSION ITSELF, THAT THE WORD CONFLICT IS THE FURTHEST FROM A

DESCRIPTION OF THE KIND OF SPIRIT THAT I'VE SEEN HERE AND THE KIND OF RAPPORT, THE KIND OF DETERMINATION TO MAKE THIS THING WORK AND TO BEGIN TO COOPERATE TOGETHER FOR A COMMON ENDEAVOR. THERE HAVE BEEN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT SOME OF THE PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS BUT THIS IS TRUE OF ANY CONFERENCE, AND I THINK THEREFORE DOUBLY TRUE OF A CONFERENCE THAT IS BREAKING NEW GROUND, THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY THAT ARAB AND ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVES OF THEIR GOVERNMENTS HAVE SAT DOWN IN ONE OF THEIR CAPITALS TO BEGIN TO TALK ABOUT PEACE."

Q: "SO YOU THINK THAT THE SPIRIT OF JERUSALEM STILL EXISTS IN CAIRO?"

A: "I THINK IT IS VERY PLEASANT HERE, I REALLY DO."

Q: "DO YOU EXPECT TO BE HOME BY CHRISTMAS?"

A: (LAUGHTER) "I DON'T THINK ANYONE CAN SAY HOW LONG THIS PARTICULAR UNCLASSIFIED

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MEETING IS GOING TO GO ON, WHETHER IT WILL RECESS AND RECONVENE. I AM PREPARED TO STAY THROUGH AS LONG AS THE TWO PRINCIPAL PARTIES WANT THESE TALKS TO GO ON. THERE SIMPLY HAS NOT BEEN ANY DISCUSSION AMONG OURSELVES YET, AMONG THE PEOPLE ATTENDING THE CONFERENCE ABOUT THE PRECISE TIMETABLE. THIS IS ONE OF THE THINGS WE MAY GET AROUND TO DISCUSSING IN THE NEXT DAY OR SO."

Q: "THERE WERE HINTS AT JERUSALEM THAT THE LEVEL OF THE TALKS WOULD BE RAISED TO FOREIGN MINISTER LEVEL AND PERHAPS EVEN TO THE HEAD OF STATE LEVEL. ARE THERE ANY INVITATIONS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER AND MR. SADAT WILL BE MEETING AT A CAIRO CONFERENCE, PERHAPS AT A CAIRO CONFERENCE IN ANOTHER VENUE?"

A: "I AM NOT AWARE OF ANY AT THE PRESENT TIME. I AM AWARE OF THE GENERAL TALK THE LAST WEEK OR SO ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THIS CONFERENCE COULD BE RAISED TO A HIGHER LEVEL AND I THINK PRESIDENT SADAT HIMSELF HAS INDICATED THAT HE WOULD HOPE THAT THIS WOULD HAPPEN AT SOME POINT. THIS I THINK WILL BE THE FUNCTION OF MEETINGS THAT ARE ABOUT TO BEGIN, HOW MUCH PROGRESS THEY MAKE, HOW FAST THEY PROGRESS, THE VIEWS OF THE GOVERNMENTS CONCERNED, THEIR ASSESSMENTS OF WHEN IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO HAVE THE CONFERENCE RAISED TO HIGHER LEVEL. THERE HAS BEEN NO DECISION ON THIS."

Q: "THE FIRST PART OF THE CAIRO CONFERENCE IS ESTIMATED TO BE LASTING ABOUT 7 DAYS OR TEN DAYS. IF IT GOES BUST IN 3 DAYS OR IF IT ENDS IN 3 DAYS, WOULD YOU COUNT THAT A FAILURE?"

A: "I JUST DON'T SEE ANY INDICATION THAT IT IS GOING TO GO BUST. I THINK THAT THERE IS A FIRM DETERMINATION ON THE PART OF BOTH THE EGYPTIAN AND ISRAELI DELEGATIONS TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE ISSUES, RECOGNIZING THAT THERE ARE DIFFICULTIES, DIFFICULT PROBLEMS IN SUBSTANCE AND PROCEDURE AND TO KEEP AT IT IN AN EFFORT TO MAKE

THE KIND OF PROGRESS, LAY THE KIND OF GROUNDWORK FOR A BROADER
CONFERENCE ULTIMATELY IN GENEVA THAT BOTH SIDES HAVE SAID IS THEIR
OBJECTIVE."

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Q: "DO YOU SEE BILATERAL SETTLEMENT SHAPING UP BETWEEN EGYPT AND
ISRAEL BY DEFAULT BY THE OTHER COUNTRIES WHO HAVE BEEN INVITED TO
THE CAIRO CONFERENCE NOT SHOWING UP?"

A: "I HONESTLY DON'T AT THIS POINT. I THINK IT'S BEEN MADE CLEAR
AT THE OPENING STATEMENTS TODAY, STATEMENTS BY THE LEADERS OF BOTH

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ISRAEL AND EGYPT THAT THEIR OBJECTIVE IS AN OVERALL CONFERENCE, THAT
THEY SEE THIS MEETING AS HELPING TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR GENEVA WHERE
ALL PARTIES CONCERNED WOULD HOPEFULLY BE PRESENT. THERE ISN'T ANY
DISCUSSION AMONG THOSE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE NEGOTIATIONS OF ANY
OTHER OBJECTIVE THAN AN OVERALL COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT."

Q: "CAN IT THEN BE SAID THAT YOU'RE OPTIMISTIC?"

A: "I THINK WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS CANNOT HELP
BUT MAKE ONE OPTIMISTIC. A NEW ATMOSPHERE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTEXT
HAS BEEN CREATED FOR PEACEMAKING. NOW THERE ARE DIFFICULT ISSUES.
THE SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES HAVEN'T CHANGED WHAT HAS CHANGED IS THE
CONTEXT OF THOSE ISSUES. AND ONE WILL SIMPLY HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE

HOW RAPIDLY IT IS POSSIBLE TO MAKE PROGRESS. I WOULD SAY THE
ATMOSPHERE IS EXCELLENT AND LET'S WAIT AND SEE HOW THE NEGOTIATIONS
GO BEFORE WE GIVE THEM ANY PARTICULARLY PRECISE CHARACTERIZATION."

Q: "THANK YOU VERY MUCH."

A: "THANK YOU." EILTS

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Message Attributes

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